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# First records of Green-backed Eremomela *Eremomela canescens* and Amethyst Sunbird *Chalcomitra amethystina* for Rwanda

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**Premières mentions pour le Rwanda de l'Éremomèle grisonnante *Eremomela canescens* et du Souimanga améthyste *Chalcomitra amethystina*.** En 2010, deux espèces d'oiseaux ont été observées pour la première fois au Rwanda : l'Éremomèle grisonnante *Eremomela canescens* (deux individus au Parc National de l'Akagera, le 8 avril) et le Souimanga améthyste *Chalcomitra amethystina* (un couple près de Kibungo, au sud-est du pays, le 21 août).

## Green-backed Eremomela *Eremomela canescens*

On 8 April 2010, at c.06.30 hrs, in Akagera National Park (01°50'56.90"S 30°43'16.97"E) at 1,650 m, in open, mixed *Acacia-Combretum-Commiphora* woodland on a hillside, I spotted two brightly plumaged birds foraging in a small bush, which I observed for c.1 minute from 5 m. Their overall size and shape were typical of an *Eremomela*, the birds being similar in size to Green-capped Eremomela *E. scotops*. Both appeared identical in having a green mantle and wings, contrasting with a grey nape and crown, which graded into a blackish mask through the eye. The throat was all white, and the breast and belly yellow. The legs were orange and the bill appeared dark. The birds soon disappeared into the centre of the bush and must have left unnoticed, as I did not see them again, despite extensive searching. They seemed familiar, but it was only upon consulting my field guide (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2004) that I identified them as Green-backed Eremomela *E. canescens*, a species which I had previously seen in Eritrea.

There are no obvious confusion species for the distinctive Green-backed Eremomela in East Africa. Having regularly visited this part of Akagera National Park during previous months, I was very familiar with both Green-capped Eremomela and Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis*, and I had observed both on several occasions during the same trip to the park. Given good views, both of these species are easily separated from *E. canescens*: *E. scotops citriniceps* in Rwanda has a bright yellow face and breast, with only narrow black lores, no grey on the crown or green on the mantle, and

a white, not yellow belly, whilst *E. icteropygialis* has grey wings and mantle, a black loreal stripe and grey legs. The only other small passerine with similar coloration to Green-backed Eremomela in Akagera is the very common Yellow-breasted Apalis *Apalis flavida*. This species, with which I am also familiar, has yellow restricted to the breast, no black face mask and a longer tail.

Green-backed Eremomela favours mixed *Acacia-Combretum* woodland (Urban *et al.* 1997). The nearest known populations of the species are found in similar habitat in central Uganda, on the Rift Valley escarpment east of Lake Albert, c.400 km further north, and in the hills between Fort Portal and Semliki, c.300 km north-west of my sighting (Carswell *et al.* 2005). Urban *et al.* (1997) do not mention any seasonal movements for this species, making it possible that an isolated population is resident in eastern Rwanda.

## Amethyst Sunbird *Chalcomitra amethystina*

On 21 August 2010 at c.15.20 hrs, within a small eucalypt and pine plantation c.4 km east of Kibungo (02°09'19.10"S 30°34'43.30"E) at 1,530 m, I observed a pair of sunbirds moving through open woodland, feeding mainly on *Leonotis* flowers in the undergrowth. The male was instantly recognisable as an Amethyst Sunbird, a species I have also observed in Tanzania, it being relatively large, very dark (at times appearing all black) but in good light showing three areas of iridescent colour, which in combination are diagnostic of the species (a purple-pink throat patch, extending from the chin to the upper breast, a green cap, and a small purple-pink 'shoulder' patch). The female had brown upperparts and brown streaks over the pale underparts, although I did not



**Figure 1.** Male Amethyst Sunbird *Chalcomitra amethystina*, near Kibungo, Rwanda, 21 August 2010 (Jason Anderson)

Souimanga améthyste *Chalcomitra amethystina*, mâle, près de Kibungo, Rwanda, 21 août 2010 (Jason Anderson)

observe it closely, focusing my attention on the male. Both birds were rather flighty and did not permit close approach, although I managed to take several photographs of the male to confirm the identification (Fig. 1). There are no previous records of this species in Rwanda (Schouteden 1966, Dowsett 1993, Cheke *et al.* 2001).

Amethyst Sunbird is common over most of Tanzania, although it is presumed to be absent from the north-west, with the nearest record shown in the Tanzanian Bird Atlas (Baker & Baker in prep.) being from 02°45'S 31°45'E, c.150 km south-east of Kibungo. Although its movements are poorly understood, the species is considered to be a partial migrant across much of its East and southern African range (Britton 1980, Cheke *et al.* 2001) which may be 'due to the availability of food plants, notably flowering *Loranthus*' (Baker & Baker in prep.). Thus, the appearance of a pair in Rwanda is perhaps unsurprising, and might reflect either seasonal migration or range expansion.

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